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ALLEN-SCOTT REPORT

Inside Washington

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Timetable for Peace in Viet Nam

WASHINGTON — President Johnson and his military and civilian advisers have a 116-day time-table to bring North Viet Nam to the conference chamber.

This is the one single important piece of information unveiled during those two days of elaborately fanfared White House briefings for members of Congress on the Viet Nam conflict.

That's all that can be reported about this intriguing item. Nothing more was said about it.

It was passingly mentioned in the course of a 15-minute otherwise general statement by Secretary Rusk about Southeast Asia. Beyond a fleeting reference to a 116-day time-table to bring about Viet Nam peace negotiations, he said nothing more regarding it.

Curiously, later no questions were asked. None of the legislators pursued the matter further. It was left dangling in the air—unexplained and unamplified.

Lesser disclosures, elicited chiefly by questions, were:

Nationalist Chinese troops will not be used to fight the Viet Cong. President Johnson brusquely cut off questions on that, saying, "That can't be done. There are good reasons against it."

UN Secretary General U. Thant is reluctant to place the Viet Nam problem before the Security Council because, "This would embarrass the six non-permanent members." Ambassador Arthur Goldberg revealed this.

Defense Secretary McNamara strongly intimated the Army had given "erroneous information" to the Senate Preparedness Subcommittee about Viet Nam's weapons and equipment

shortages. Last week Senator John Stennis, D-Miss., chairman, announced the committee staff had submitted a report charging numerous shortages. McNamara flatly denied that.

Nothing else of any consequence was imparted to the senators and congressmen who attended the four two-hour briefings.

What these sessions added up to was big publicity hooplah and little substance.

Sardonically remarked an influential Democratic senator, "We didn't learn a thing we already didn't know. With a few minor exceptions everything we were told had either been published or broadcast. Most of what (General) Taylor and (Ambassador) Harriman said was a repetition of their television interviews the day before. The whole affair is what I would call a propaganda stunt."

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

At each of the four briefings, President Johnson sternly enjoined silence and secrecy on the legislators.

Although no classified information of any kind was divulged, the President went out of his way to stress that the sessions were confidential and off the record. Nothing remotely resembling a military or any other secret was touched on. But the President acted as if the lawmakers were being let in on the hottest inside information.

Graphically illustrative of his touchy attitude was his sharp response to a question by Representative Peter Frelinghuysen, R-N.J., member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, about relations with the new South Viet Nam government. He cited a haughty remark that he didn't

consider it necessary to greet Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge when he arrives in Saigon.

"This subject is a very sensitive area," snapped Johnson. "I don't feel it should be discussed here. As I said before, ladies and gentlemen, I must remind you that everything said here is strictly off the record. We are talking privately and nothing must be said about it."

The two leading Democratic critics of Viet Nam policy, Senators Wayne Morse, Ore., and Ernest Gruening, Alaska, remained silent throughout the briefing they attended.

Most of the questions were by Republicans.

Senator Jack Miller, R-Iowa, raised the matter of employing Nationalist Chinese troops in Viet Nam. A member of the Armed Services Committee, he asked, "Why aren't they used? They have expressed a desire to fight the Viet Cong, so why not give them the opportunity?"

"We can't do that," spoke up President Johnson. "I decided against it."

Refusing to be brushed off, Miller persisted, "Why? What's the reason? We've spent billions on Formosa; we've armed and trained these troops; they are Asian; so why aren't they available?"

Retorted Johnson brusquely, "It can't be done. That's the answer."

MORE BRUSH-OFFS

Senator Margaret Chase Smith, R-Me., member of the Armed Services Committee, and Representative Frances Bolton, R-O., member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, similarly got nowhere inquiring about arms and equipment shortages.

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